MARJORIE LIU
SANA TAKEDA
image
25
MONSTRESS
END OF THE LINE
2019 HUGO AWARD WINNER

THE MONSTRESS STORY SO FAR...

Maika Halfwolf has learned many uncomfortable truths since she started her quest to find out more about her past and the Monstrum, Zinn, that lives inside her body. But no revelation has shaken her as much as her encounter with her biological father, the eye-marked descendant of the Shaman-Empress. Known as the Lord Doctor to his followers in the cultish and clandestine Blood Court, and as the Ghoul Killer to the unlucky residents of the towns and villages he passes through in his hunt for flesh, Maika's father is a force to be reckoned with. Though he allowed Maika to leave his compound safely with a new (and unrequested) prosthetic arm, he also gave her a glimpse of the knowledge and power he had gained as Zinn's former host – knowledge that has left Zinn nearly catatonic with shock.

After rejoining her friends and allies, Maika hoped to continue her search for the pieces of the Shaman-Empress's mask, an object that even in fragments has already proved capable of opening a rift in the sky and releasing long-imprisoned Monstra. But a more immediate concern soon arrived in the shape of a massive bomb set off by the Blood Court in the Cumaean holy city of Aurum. A new war between humans and Arcanics has officially begun, and Maika is bound to be caught in the crossfire.

THE PLAYERS...

MAIKA An Arcanic teen who survived the Great War, and slavery at the hands of the Cumaean witch nuns. Ruthless and haunted, she is determined to uncover the truth behind her mother's murder — and her mother's secrets — in the hope that she can free herself from an ancient and dangerous god called a Monstrum that is imprisoned inside her body and fills her with an otherworldly hunger for human flesh.

ZINN A mysterious, primordial Monstrum of tremendous power that shares Maika's body and mind, and fights her for control. Once considered a god, and drawn into this world by the Shaman-Empress, this Monstrum is driven by a deadly hunger, consuming the lives of humans and Arcanics alike, leaving only their desiccated corpses behind. Though it may give the impression that its only wish is to survive, there's far more to this creature, and its desires, than meets the eye…

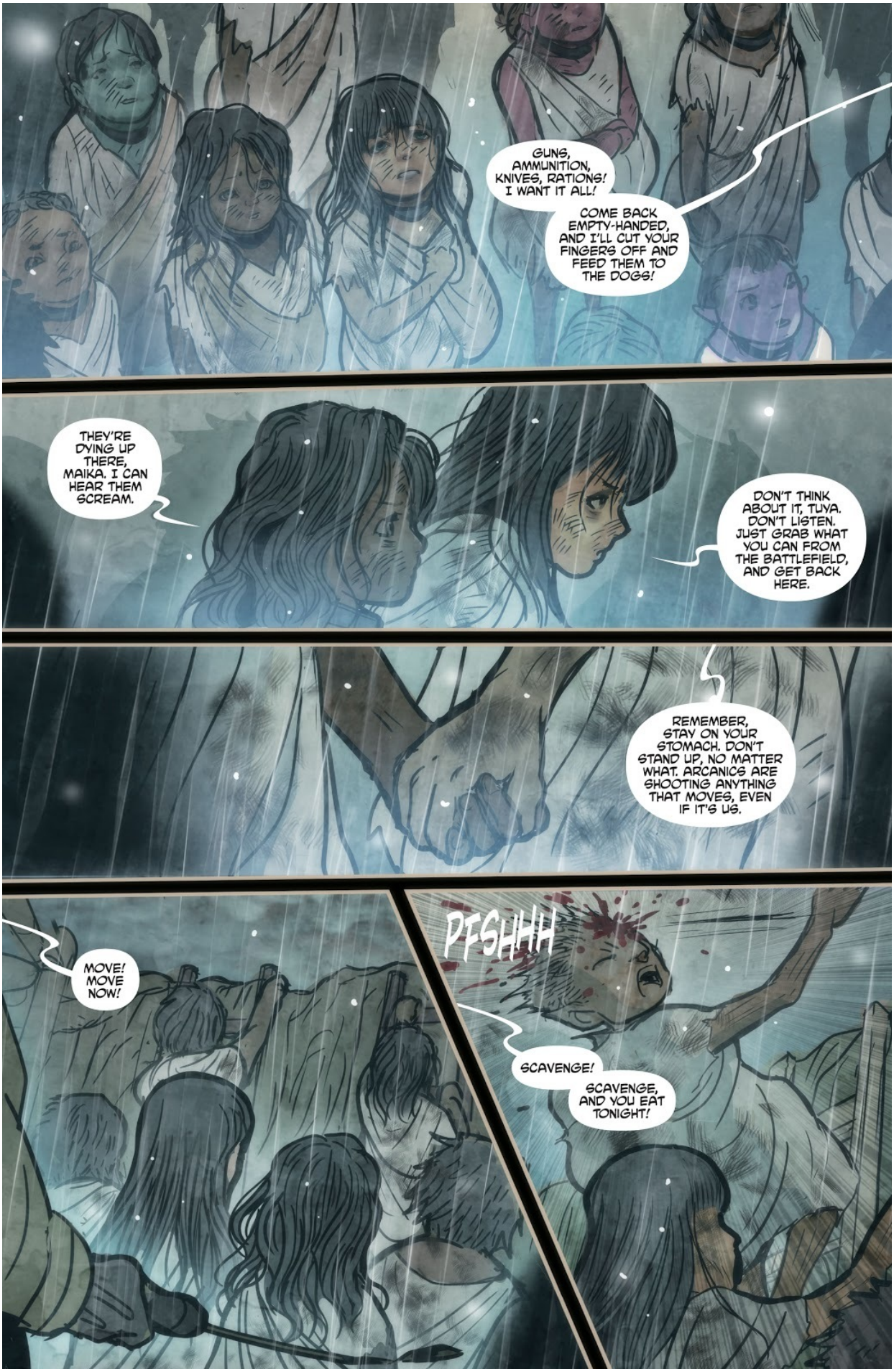
KIPPA An Arcanic fox girl saved from slavery by Maika. Innocent and optimistic, she is frightened by the Monstrum — but trusts Maika and will bravely defend her and others by rushing into battles too dangerous for a child.

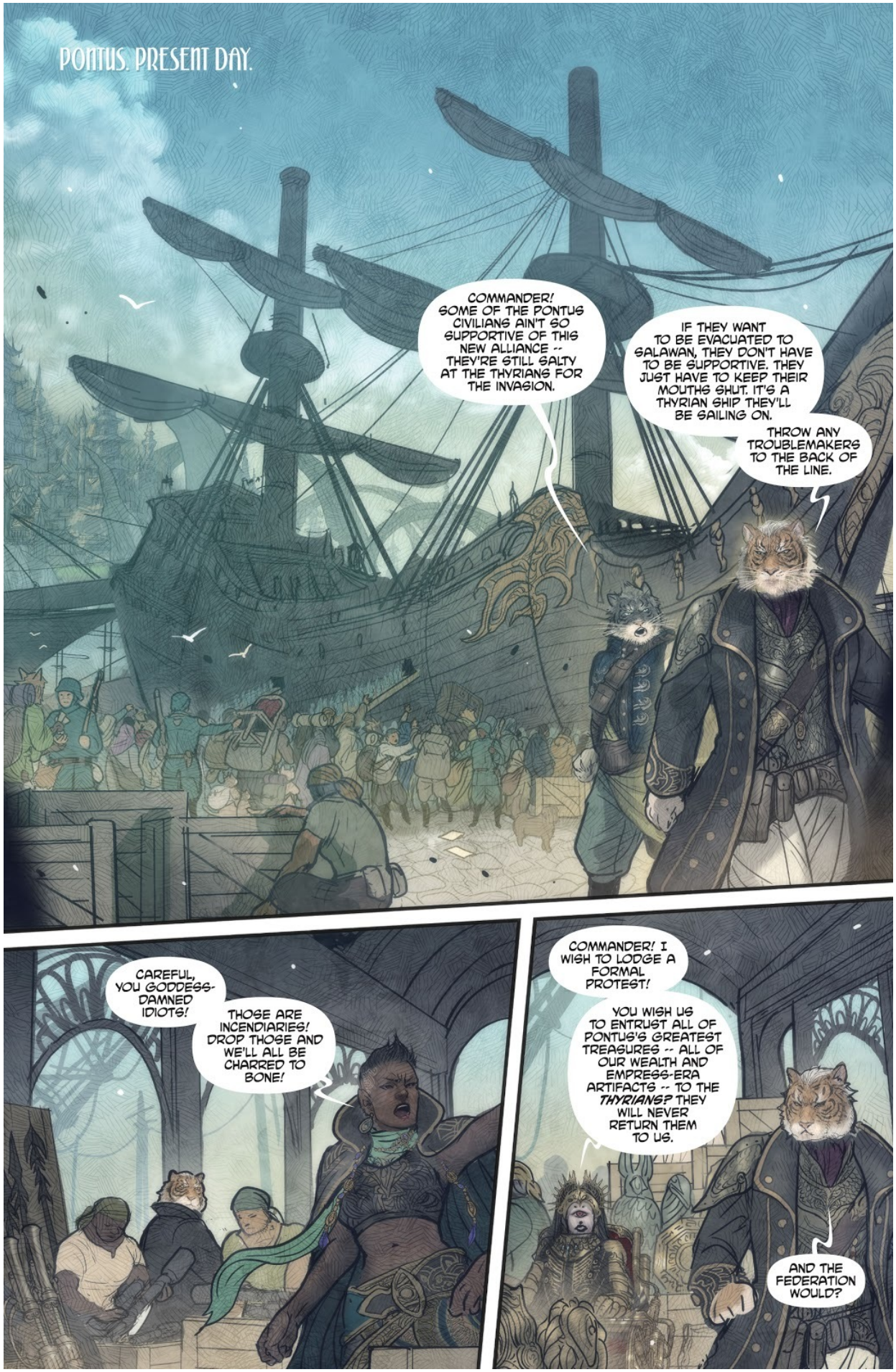
SIR CORVIN D'ORO An Arcanic Lord, First Watchman of the Court and Commander of the Inner Wall. He is loyal to the Dusk Court but has willingly defied their orders because of his desire to protect Maika and his belief that she can and will serve a greater purpose.

GULL An Inquisitrix working for the Cumaean Mother Superior. Unlike the rest of the Inquisitrixes, Gull is secretly the host for one of a group of Monstra living among the Cumaea. Though she cares little about humans or Arcanics as a whole, she owes her life to Maika and has begun to question her group's motives.

SEIZI An Arcanic hybrid and former pirate who has amassed a fortune with his brother Kenzi, he is fiercely loyal to his goddess-daughter, Maika. During his days of piracy, he knew Moriko Halfwolf well — and brought her to dangerous lands in her relentless quest to find answers about the Shaman-Empress.

Read more FREE comics on ReadComicOnline

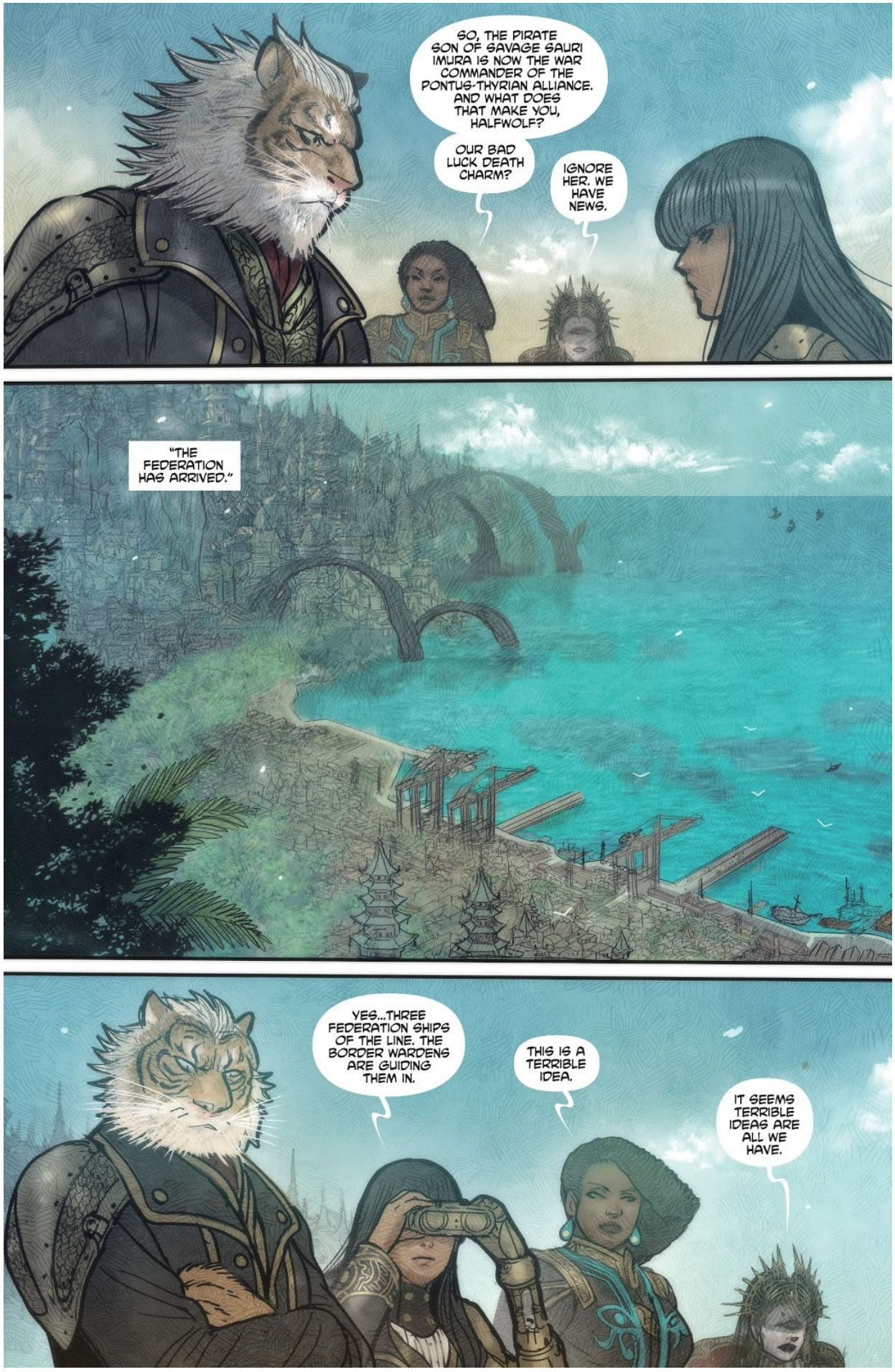

GUNS, AMMUNITION, KNIVES, RATIONS! I WANT IT ALL!
COME BACK EMPTY-HANDED, AND I'LL CUT YOUR FINGERS OFF AND FEED THEM TO THE DOGS!
THEY'RE DYING UP THERE, MAIKA. I CAN HEAR THEM SCREAM.
DON'T THINK ABOUT IT, TUVA. DON'T LISTEN. JUST GRAB WHAT YOU CAN FROM THE BATTLEFIELD, AND GET BACK HERE.
REMEMBER, STAY ON YOUR STOMACH. DON'T STAND UP, NO MATTER WHAT. ARCANICS ARE SHOOTING ANYTHING THAT MOVES, EVEN IF IT'S US.
MOVE! MOVE NOW!
PFSHHH
SCAVENGE!
SCAVENGE, AND YOU EAT TONIGHT!

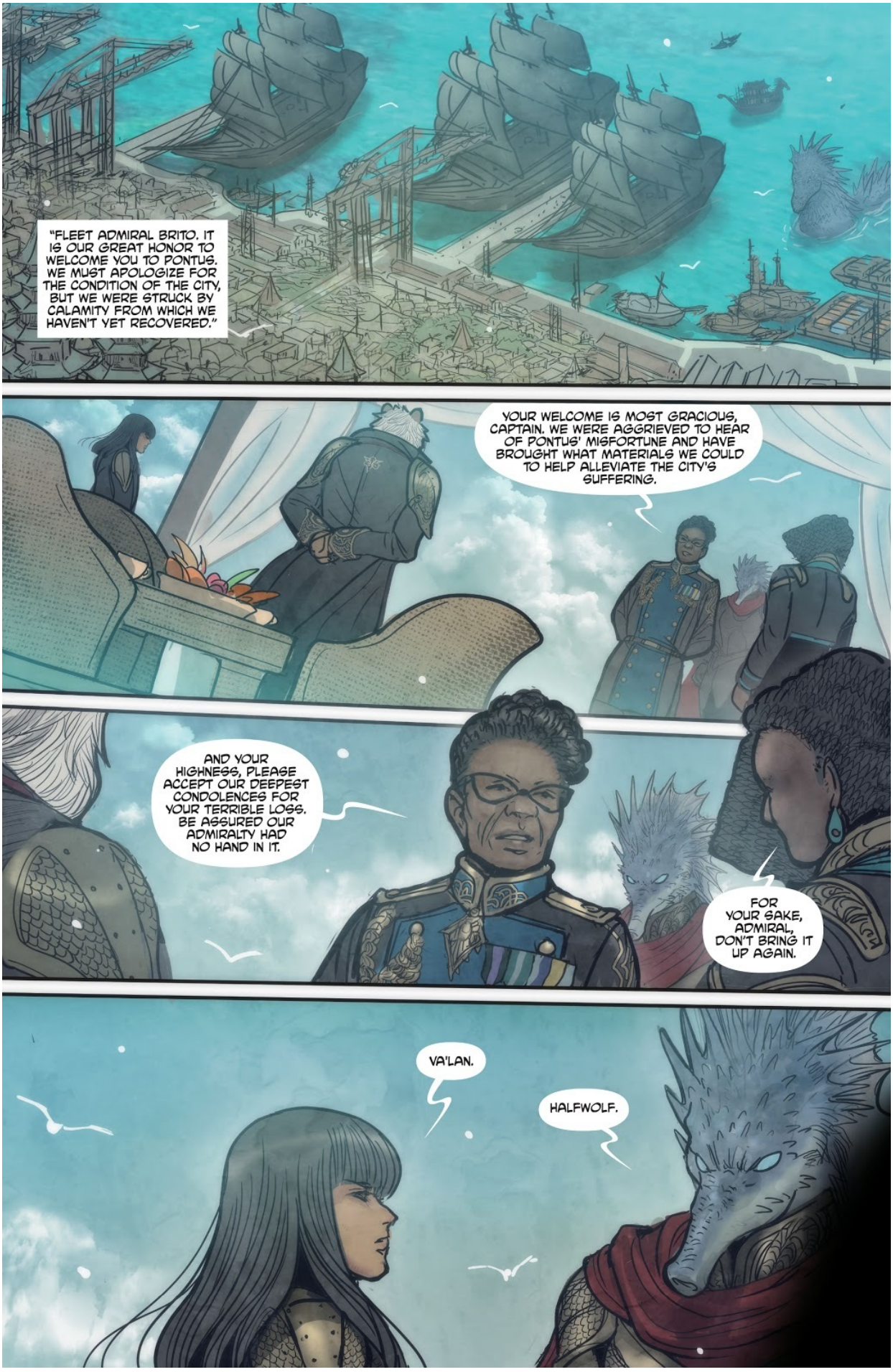

PONTUS. PRESENT DAY.
COMMANDER! SOME OF THE PONTUS CIVILIANS AIN'T SO SUPPORTIVE OF THIS NEW ALLIANCE -- THEY'RE STILL SALTY AT THE THYRIANS FOR THE INVASION.
IF THEY WANT TO BE EVACUATED TO SALAWAN, THEY DON'T HAVE TO BE SUPPORTIVE. THEY JUST HAVE TO KEEP THEIR MOUTHS SHUT. IT'S A THYRIAN SHIP THEY'LL BE SAILING ON.
THROW ANY TROUBLEMAKERS TO THE BACK OF THE LINE.
CAREFUL, YOU GODDESS-DAMNED IDIOTS!
THOSE ARE INCENDIARIES! DROP THOSE AND WE'LL ALL BE CHARRED TO BONE!
COMMANDER! I WISH TO LODGE A FORMAL PROTEST!
YOU WISH US TO ENTRUST ALL OF PONTUS'S GREATEST TREASURES -- ALL OF OUR WEALTH AND EMPRESS-ERA ARTIFACTS -- TO THE *THYRIANS?* THEY WILL NEVER RETURN THEM TO US.
AND THE FEDERATION WOULD?

THE NEW CONSTANTINE.
THAT'S WHAT FEDERATION NEWSPAPERS ARE CALLING THE BOMBING IN AURUM, MISS.
OLD TOOTH SAYS THEY'RE A BUNCH OF LIARS BECAUSE ONLY A COUPLE THOUSAND DIED IN AURUM COMPARED TO HOW MANY DIED IN CONSTANTINE...BUT A COUPLE THOUSAND IS STILL AN AWFUL LOT OF PEOPLE, ISN'T IT, MISS?
KENZI SENDS HIS FAREWELL, MAIKA. HE LEFT THIS MORNING FOR THE HOMELANDS, TO RALLY THE CLANS AND SEEK OUR ANCIENTS' HELP IN THE COMING CONFLICT.
THEY STAYED OUT OF THE LAST WAR, MISTER SEIZI?
YES. BUT I'M HOPING KENZI CAN MAKE THEM UNDERSTAND WHAT'S COMING.
A LESSON FOR YOU, KIPPA.
A CUNNING PIRATE KNOWS SHE WON'T SURVIVE WITHOUT LOYAL FRIENDS AND POWERFUL ALLIES. OR AS THE POETS SAY...WITHOUT HER PACK, A WOLF IS NOTHING BUT A DOG WITHOUT TEETH.
MAIKA... YOUR NEW ARM IS IMPRESSIVELY FUNCTIONAL.
I'VE NEVER SEEN A PROSTHETIC GRAFTED SO SEAMLESSLY TO A NERVOUS SYSTEM.
YOU'RE NOT TALKING TO ME?
SHE'S NOT TALKING TO ANYONE. I THINK SHE'S SAD.
WHICH IS BETTER THAN MAD.
BELIEVE IT OR NOT, I'VE ACTUALLY SEEN HER HAPPY.
THAT MUST HAVE BEEN SCARY.
YOU'LL LIKE IT. I PROMISE.

GO FIND VIHN. SHE'S PREPARING TO DESTROY THE ELEVATOR DOWN TO THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS'S LAB.
I'M SURE SHE COULD USE YOUR HELP.
BARRING ANY FOOLISHNESS, PONTUS WILL BE EVACUATED WITHIN THE NEXT TWO WEEKS. AT LEAST THOSE WHO WISH TO LEAVE.
THE REAL TRICK WILL BE SECURING THYRIA.
YOUNG WOLF... LOOK AT ME.
YOU MET YOUR FATHER.
VIHN EXPLAINED.
BUT YOU ALREADY KNEW ABOUT HIM. AND YOU DIDN'T TELL ME.
I PROMISED MORIKO.
I'M SORRY, MAIKA.

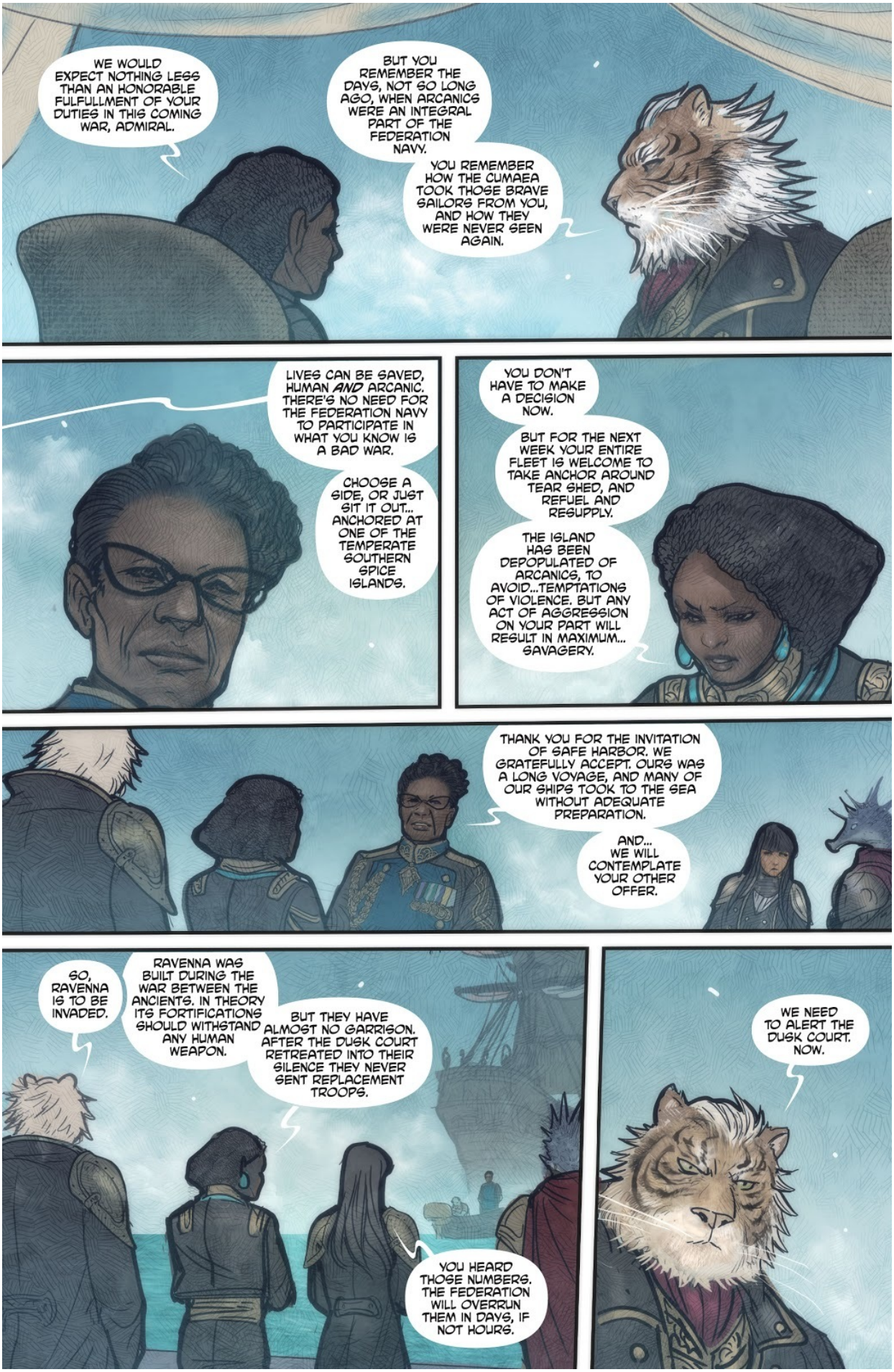
HE KNOWS EVERYTHING ABOUT ME, SEIZI.
I TRIED TO STOP HIM, AND I COULDN'T EVEN TOUCH HIM. HE'S TOO FUCKING STRONG.
THE ONLY REASON HE DIDN'T KILL ME WAS BECAUSE HE HAS A PLAN FOR ME.
THEY ALL HAVE PLANS FOR ME. MY FATHER, MY MOTHER, THE MOTHER SUPERIOR, THE COURTS.
THE ONLY PLAN THAT TRULY MATTERS IS THE ONE YOU HAVE FOR YOURSELF.
I WANT TO GET AWAY FROM ALL OF YOU. I WANT TO GO BACK TO THE NORTH AND FIND MY... FRIEND.
EXCEPT IT'S TOO LATE FOR RUNNING. EVEN A TOOTHLESS DOG EVENTUALLY HAS TO TURN TO FACE ITS ATTACKERS.
YOUR FATHER WAS A LESSON, MAIKA...IF YOU HAVE THE MIND TO LEARN IT.
HE IS STRONG... AND BECAUSE HE IS STRONG HE MAKES WAR ON THE WORLD. BUT HE DOES NOT WAR WITH HIMSELF.
YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE THAT ADVANTAGE.
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I AM.
AND YOU WON'T EVER KNOW IF ALL YOU DO IS HATE WHAT YOU ARE.
SEIZI...I HEARD A RUMOR IN THE BLOOD COURT...THAT YOU AND MY MOTHER WERE MARRIED.
YOU NEVER MENTIONED THAT, EITHER. AND I KNOW SHE WAS WITH YOU WHEN SHE WAS PREGNANT.
OF THESE MATTERS...I CANNOT SPEAK. I GAVE MORIKO MY WORD.
I WISH PROMISES DIDN'T LAST BEYOND DEATH.
YOU AND I ARE A LOT ALIKE, SEIZI. WE'RE BOTH MY MOTHER'S PAWNS.

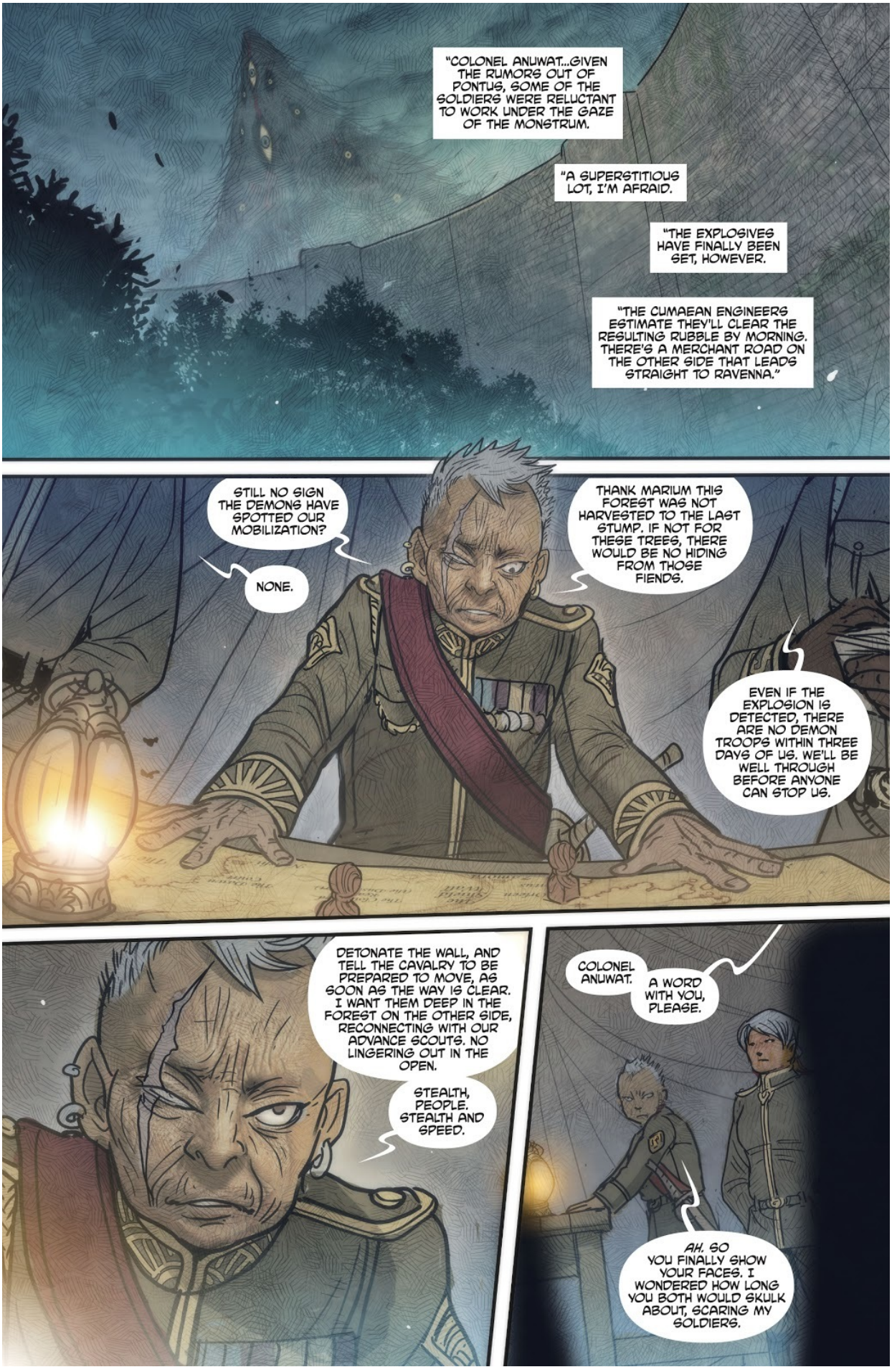

SO, THE PIRATE SON OF SAVAGE SAURI IMURA IS NOW THE WAR COMMANDER OF THE PONTUS-THYRIAN ALLIANCE. AND WHAT DOES THAT MAKE YOU, HALFWOLF?
OUR BAD LUCK DEATH CHARM?
IGNORE HER. WE HAVE NEWS.
"THE FEDERATION HAS ARRIVED."
YES...THREE FEDERATION SHIPS OF THE LINE. THE BORDER WARDENS ARE GUIDING THEM IN.
THIS IS A TERRIBLE IDEA.
IT SEEMS TERRIBLE IDEAS ARE ALL WE HAVE.

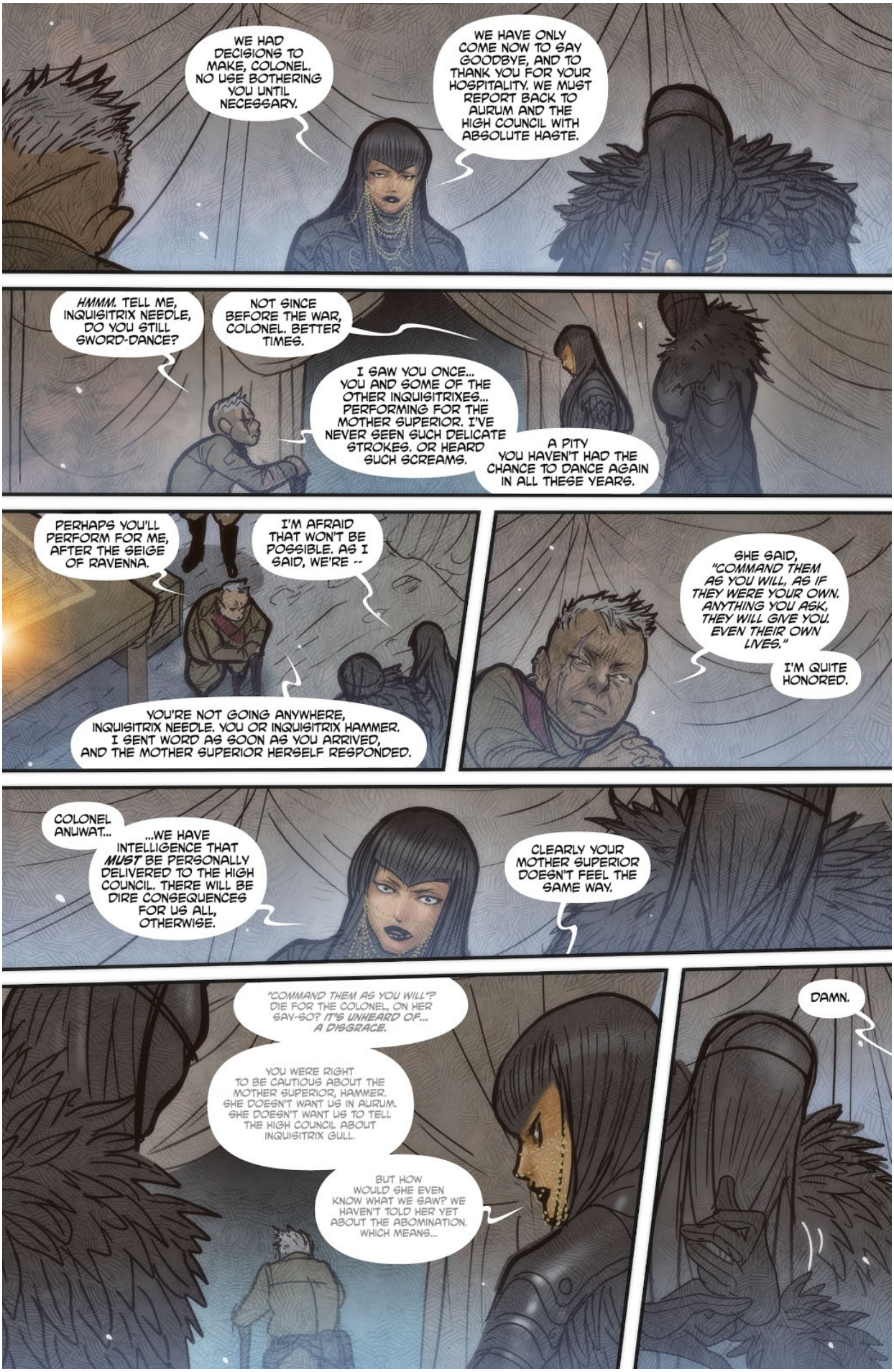

"FLEET ADMIRAL BRITO. IT IS OUR GREAT HONOR TO WELCOME YOU TO PONTUS. WE MUST APOLOGIZE FOR THE CONDITION OF THE CITY, BUT WE WERE STRUCK BY CALAMITY FROM WHICH WE HAVEN'T YET RECOVERED."
YOUR WELCOME IS MOST GRACIOUS, CAPTAIN. WE WERE AGGRIEVED TO HEAR OF PONTUS' MISFORTUNE AND HAVE BROUGHT WHAT MATERIALS WE COULD TO HELP ALLEVIATE THE CITY'S SUFFERING.
AND YOUR HIGHNESS, PLEASE ACCEPT OUR DEEPEST CONDOLENCES FOR YOUR TERRIBLE LOSS. BE ASSURED OUR ADMIRALTY HAD NO HAND IN IT.
FOR YOUR SAKE, ADMIRAL, DON'T BRING IT UP AGAIN.
VA'LAN.
HALFWOLF.

I WAS SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT YOU WERE THE ONE WHO COORDINATED THIS MEETING. I THOUGHT YOU WERE ONLY AN OBSERVER IN THESE MATTERS.
THE WAVE COURT IS STILL UNDECIDED. WHICH IS WHY I'M HERE. *OBSERVING.*
I CONFESS, I'M RATHER SURPRISED YOU LEFT YOUR FATHER'S COURT SO QUICKLY.
HE WANTS A WAR.
AND YOU?
I WANT TO STOP ONE.
HOW VERY ADMIRABLE. AND HERE I THOUGHT YOU WERE UNDECIDED, TOO.
THE AURUM BOMBING WAS THE WORK OF A SPLINTER GROUP, ACTING ON ITS OWN.
IT WAS NOT ORDERED BY THE DAWN OR DUSK COURTS.
AND YET, WAR IS NOW IMMINENT.
I RECEIVED REPORTS TODAY THAT COLONEL ANUWAT HAS MOBILIZED ELEMENTS OF THE FEDERATION ARMY AND IS PLANNING TO STRIKE THE BORDER CITY OF RAVENNA.
SHE WILL BREACH THE BARRIER WALL *TONIGHT* AND CROSS OVER INTO THE DUSKLANDS WITH FIVE THOUSAND SOLDIERS. HER AIRSHIPS WILL FOLLOW, CARRYING ANOTHER THREE THOUSAND.
IN FOUR DAYS SHE WILL BE IN RAVENNA.
THIS IS... VERY SPECIFIC INFORMATION, ADMIRAL.
I DIDN'T KNOW I WAS *THAT* GRACIOUS.

THE NAVY AND THE ARMY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AT ODDS.
OUR ADMIRALTY WANTED NO PART IN THE LAST WAR. AND WE WANT NO PART IN THIS ONE.
YOU STILL FOLLOWED ORDERS AND KILLED OUR KIND, THOUGH.
YOU EXPECTED US TO BREAK OATH DURING A WAR AND BE LABELED TRAITORS BY EVERY HUMAN IN THE KNOWN WORLD?
OR GIVE THE CUMAEA AN EXCUSE TO SLAUGHTER OUR LAND-BOUND FAMILIES?
BUT YOU'RE HERE NOW. GIVING US INFORMATION THAT WOULD HAVE YOU LABELED AS TRAITORS.
YOUR FAMILIES AREN'T ON LAND NOW, ARE THEY?
NO. WE LEARNED OUR LESSON FROM THE LAST WAR.


WE WOULD EXPECT NOTHING LESS THAN AN HONORABLE FULFULLMENT OF YOUR DUTIES IN THIS COMING WAR, ADMIRAL.
BUT YOU REMEMBER THE DAYS, NOT SO LONG AGO, WHEN ARCANICS WERE AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE FEDERATION NAVY.
YOU REMEMBER HOW THE CUMAEA TOOK THOSE BRAVE SAILORS FROM YOU, AND HOW THEY WERE NEVER SEEN AGAIN.
LIVES CAN BE SAVED, HUMAN *AND* ARCANIC. THERE'S NO NEED FOR THE FEDERATION NAVY TO PARTICIPATE IN WHAT YOU KNOW IS A BAD WAR.
CHOOSE A SIDE, OR JUST SIT IT OUT... ANCHORED AT ONE OF THE TEMPERATE SOUTHERN SPICE ISLANDS.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE A DECISION NOW.
BUT FOR THE NEXT WEEK YOUR ENTIRE FLEET IS WELCOME TO TAKE ANCHOR AROUND TEAR SHED, AND REFUEL AND RESUPPLY.
THE ISLAND HAS BEEN DEPOPULATED OF ARCANICS, TO AVOID...TEMPTATIONS OF VIOLENCE. BUT ANY ACT OF AGGRESSION ON YOUR PART WILL RESULT IN MAXIMUM... SAVAGERY.
THANK YOU FOR THE INVITATION OF SAFE HARBOR. WE GRATEFULLY ACCEPT. OURS WAS A LONG VOYAGE, AND MANY OF OUR SHIPS TOOK TO THE SEA WITHOUT ADEQUATE PREPARATION.
AND... WE WILL CONTEMPLATE YOUR OTHER OFFER.
SO, RAVENNA IS TO BE INVADED.
RAVENNA WAS BUILT DURING THE WAR BETWEEN THE ANCIENTS. IN THEORY ITS FORTIFICATIONS SHOULD WITHSTAND ANY HUMAN WEAPON.
BUT THEY HAVE ALMOST NO GARRISON. AFTER THE DUSK COURT RETREATED INTO THEIR SILENCE THEY NEVER SENT REPLACEMENT TROOPS.
YOU HEARD THOSE NUMBERS. THE FEDERATION WILL OVERRUN THEM IN DAYS, IF NOT HOURS.
WE NEED TO ALERT THE DUSK COURT. NOW.

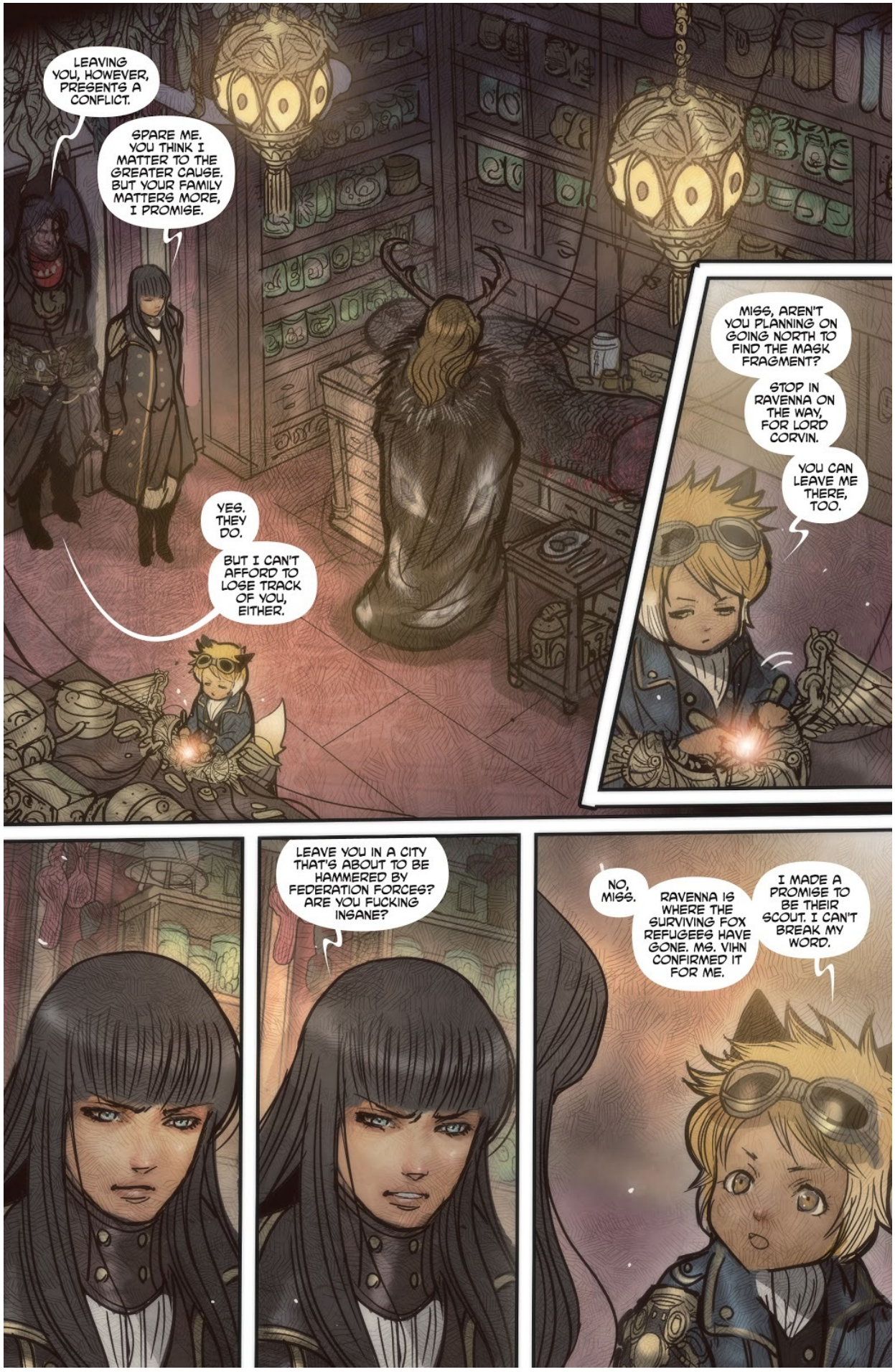

"COLONEL ANUWAT...GIVEN THE RUMORS OUT OF PONTUS, SOME OF THE SOLDIERS WERE RELUCTANT TO WORK UNDER THE GAZE OF THE MONSTRUM.
"A SUPERSTITIOUS LOT, I'M AFRAID.
"THE EXPLOSIVES HAVE FINALLY BEEN SET, HOWEVER.
"THE CUMAEAN ENGINEERS ESTIMATE THEY'LL CLEAR THE RESULTING RUBBLE BY MORNING. THERE'S A MERCHANT ROAD ON THE OTHER SIDE THAT LEADS STRAIGHT TO RAVENNA."
STILL NO SIGN THE DEMONS HAVE SPOTTED OUR MOBILIZATION?
NONE.
THANK MARIUM THIS FOREST WAS NOT HARVESTED TO THE LAST STUMP. IF NOT FOR THESE TREES, THERE WOULD BE NO HIDING FROM THOSE FIENDS.
EVEN IF THE EXPLOSION IS DETECTED, THERE ARE NO DEMON TROOPS WITHIN THREE DAYS OF US. WE'LL BE WELL THROUGH BEFORE ANYONE CAN STOP US.
DETONATE THE WALL, AND TELL THE CAVALRY TO BE PREPARED TO MOVE, AS SOON AS THE WAY IS CLEAR. I WANT THEM DEEP IN THE FOREST ON THE OTHER SIDE, RECONNECTING WITH OUR ADVANCE SCOUTS. NO LINGERING OUT IN THE OPEN.
STEALTH, PEOPLE. STEALTH AND SPEED.
COLONEL ANUWAT.
A WORD WITH YOU, PLEASE.
AH. SO YOU FINALLY SHOW YOUR FACES. I WONDERED HOW LONG YOU BOTH WOULD SKULK ABOUT, SCARING MY SOLDIERS.


WE HAD DECISIONS TO MAKE, COLONEL. NO USE BOTHERING YOU UNTIL NECESSARY.
WE HAVE ONLY COME NOW TO SAY GOODBYE, AND TO THANK YOU FOR YOUR HOSPITALITY. WE MUST REPORT BACK TO AURUM AND THE HIGH COUNCIL WITH ABSOLUTE HASTE.
HMMM. TELL ME, INQUISITRIX NEEDLE, DO YOU STILL SWORD-DANCE?
NOT SINCE BEFORE THE WAR, COLONEL. BETTER TIMES.
I SAW YOU ONCE... YOU AND SOME OF THE OTHER INQUISITRIXES... PERFORMING FOR THE MOTHER SUPERIOR. I'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH DELICATE STROKES. OR HEARD SUCH SCREAMS.
A PITY YOU HAVEN'T HAD THE CHANCE TO DANCE AGAIN IN ALL THESE YEARS.
PERHAPS YOU'LL PERFORM FOR ME, AFTER THE SEIGE OF RAVENNA.
I'M AFRAID THAT WON'T BE POSSIBLE. AS I SAID, WE'RE --
YOU'RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE, INQUISITRIX NEEDLE. YOU OR INQUISITRIX HAMMER. I SENT WORD AS SOON AS YOU ARRIVED, AND THE MOTHER SUPERIOR HERSELF RESPONDED.
SHE SAID, "COMMAND THEM AS YOU WILL, AS IF THEY WERE YOUR OWN. ANYTHING YOU ASK, THEY WILL GIVE YOU. EVEN THEIR OWN LIVES."
I'M QUITE HONORED.
COLONEL ANUWAT...
...WE HAVE INTELLIGENCE THAT *MUST* BE PERSONALLY DELIVERED TO THE HIGH COUNCIL. THERE WILL BE DIRE CONSEQUENCES FOR US ALL, OTHERWISE.
CLEARLY YOUR MOTHER SUPERIOR DOESN'T FEEL THE SAME WAY.
"COMMAND THEM AS YOU WILL"? DIE FOR THE COLONEL, ON HER SAY-SO? *IT'S UNHEARD OF... A DISGRACE.*
YOU WERE RIGHT TO BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT THE MOTHER SUPERIOR, HAMMER. SHE DOESN'T WANT US IN AURUM. SHE DOESN'T WANT US TO TELL THE HIGH COUNCIL ABOUT INQUISITRIX GULL.
BUT HOW WOULD SHE EVEN KNOW WHAT WE SAW? WE HAVEN'T TOLD HER YET ABOUT THE ABOMINATION. WHICH MEANS...
DAMN.

CONSTANTINE.
"THE PEACE TALKS BEGIN IN TWO DAYS, RESAK, BUT WITH AURUM STILL BURNING WHAT'S THE USE OF TALKING?"
I'M SURPRISED THE INQUISITRIXES HAVEN'T LEARNED OF THIS NEGOTIATION AND KILLED US OUTRIGHT.
PERHAPS YOU CAN KEEP THAT TO YOURSELF WHEN WE MEET THE OTHER ENVOYS. THEY'LL BE NERVOUS ENOUGH, GIVEN THE NEW POLITICAL SITUATION.
I DON'T KNOW IF I'LL BE ABLE TO STAY SILENT.
SOMETHING WRONG IS GOING TO HAPPEN. WE STEPPED OFF THE TRANSPORT AND THE NAUSEA HIT. YOU MUST FEEL IT, TOO.
YES. I'VE GOT THAT BITTER TASTE IN MY THROAT. IT ALWAYS MEANS BLOOD.
:SIGH:
WE'RE HERE.
INN
THEY'RE EXPECTING US. WE'RE LATE. SO MUCH TO GO OVER.
WE CAN WAIT, RESAK. WE SHOULD WAIT.
UNTIL WE'RE SURE WHERE THE FEELING OF DANGER IS COMING FROM.
INN

PERHAPS I SHOULD AT LEAST WARN THEM.
STAY WHERE YOU ARE.
BUT --
BOOM!
WE NEED TO CONTACT THE ADMIRAL.
MARIUM, SAVE US.

BETTANI, THE FEDERATION ARMY IS ONLY DAYS AWAY. THOUSANDS STRONG, WITH AIRSHIPS.
NO, YOU CAN'T COUNT ON THE DUSK COURT TO INTERVENE. THEY TAKE TOO LONG TO MAKE DECISIONS. RAVENNA WILL BE LOST BY --
THERE IS TIME TO EVACUATE. TELL YOUR --
DAMN HER.
I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER SEEN YOU THIS ANGRY. FAMILY?
MY YOUNGEST SISTER LIVES JUST OUTSIDE OF RAVENNA. WE'VE NEVER BEEN CLOSE. SHE'S A HEALER, AND THE REST OF US...ARE WARRIORS.
BETTANI WAS EMBEDDED IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS FOR MOST OF THE WAR, PART OF AN EDENITE AID GROUP.
AND LET ME GUESS...SHE DOESN'T WANT TO LEAVE RAVENNA.
I WILL HAVE TO GO.
AND, WHAT? CARRY HER OFF? SHE'LL LOVE YOU FOR THAT.
SHE CAN HATE ME, BUT SHE'LL BE ALIVE. MY FAMILY CAN'T LOSE ANYONE ELSE.
HMMM. FINALLY, LORD CORVIN D'ORO REVEALS HIS FATAL WEAKNESS.
SARCASM IS BENEATH YOU, HALFWOLF. AS IS HYPOCRISY.
YOU, WHO RAN INTO THE MADNESS TO FIND KIPPA.
LOYALTY MIGHT VERY WELL BE FATAL, BUT IT IS NO WEAKNESS.


LEAVING YOU, HOWEVER, PRESENTS A CONFLICT.
SPARE ME. YOU THINK I MATTER TO THE GREATER CAUSE. BUT YOUR FAMILY MATTERS MORE, I PROMISE.
YES. THEY DO.
BUT I CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE TRACK OF YOU, EITHER.
MISS, AREN'T YOU PLANNING ON GOING NORTH TO FIND THE MASK FRAGMENT?
STOP IN RAVENNA ON THE WAY, FOR LORD CORVIN.
YOU CAN LEAVE ME THERE, TOO.
LEAVE YOU IN A CITY THAT'S ABOUT TO BE HAMMERED BY FEDERATION FORCES? ARE YOU FUCKING INSANE?
NO, MISS.
RAVENNA IS WHERE THE SURVIVING FOX REFUGEES HAVE GONE. MS. VIHN CONFIRMED IT FOR ME.
I MADE A PROMISE TO BE THEIR SCOUT. I CAN'T BREAK MY WORD.

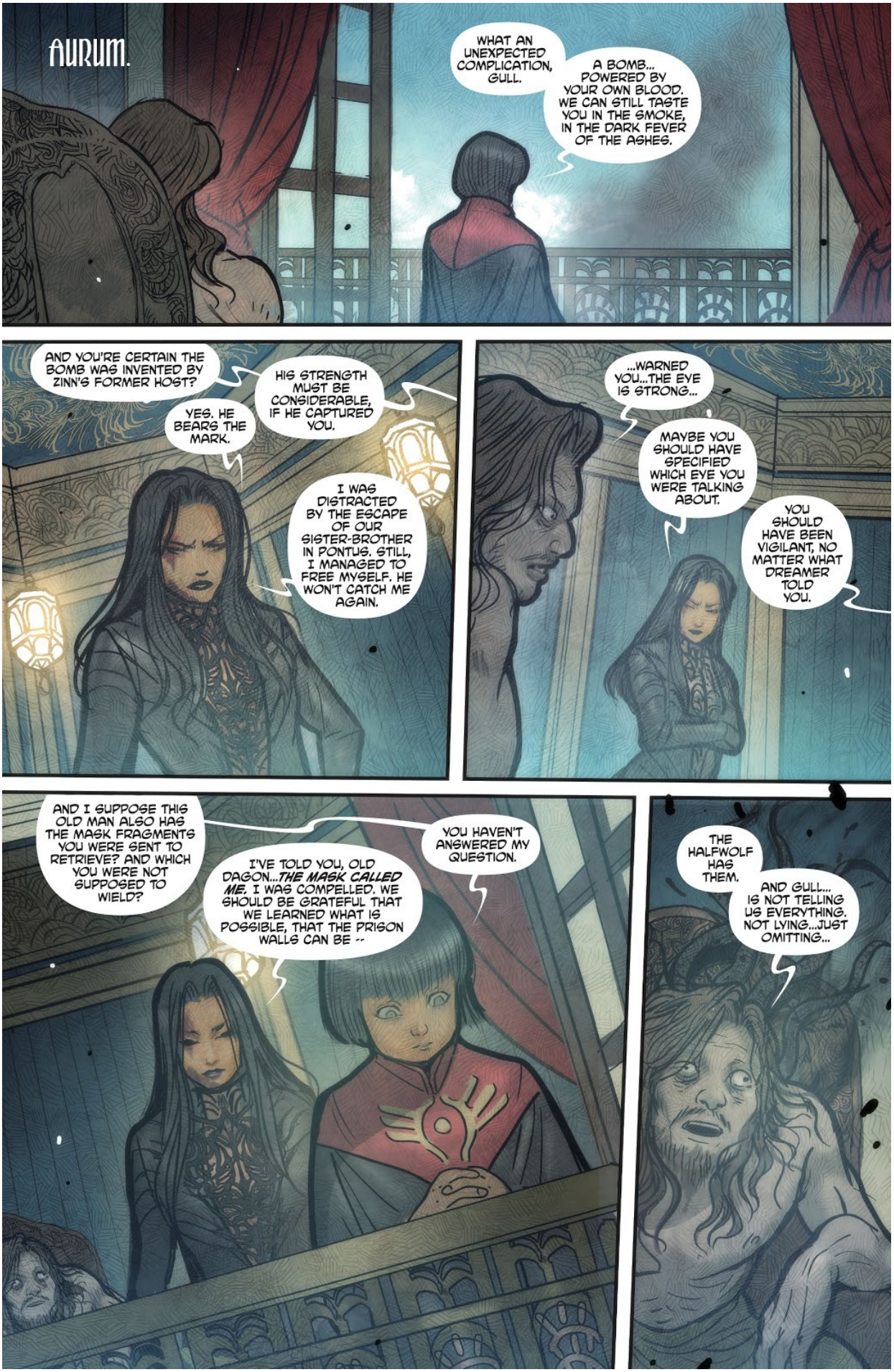
I'M GOING TO KILL YOU, VIHN.
AS IF IT'S POSSIBLE TO LIE TO A CHILD WHO CAN SEE THE TRUTH...
AND YOU, LITTLE FOX, ARE ABSOLUTELY GOING TO BREAK YOUR WORD. YOU'RE STAYING HERE WITH SEIZI.
I'LL LEAVE AFTER YOU'RE GONE, AND GO ON FOOT.
AH! I KNEW IT NEEDED POWER!
ZZZZZT
URRR.
PFFFRR
ANCIENT TECHNOLOGY TENDS TO BE INCOMPATIBLE WITH MODERN, LESS ADVANCED, POWER SOURCES. SOMETHING TO REMEMBER IN THE FUTURE.
YOU KNEW THIS WOULD HAPPEN?
I SUSPECTED. BUT ONE MUST LEAVE ROOM FOR SURPRISE WHEN EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW THINGS.
FSSSS
I'LL TELL SEIZI TO PUT YOU ON A BOAT AND KEEP YOU AT SEA. JUST TRY TO LEAVE THEN.
OH, I WILL.
THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY, MISS.
HM.

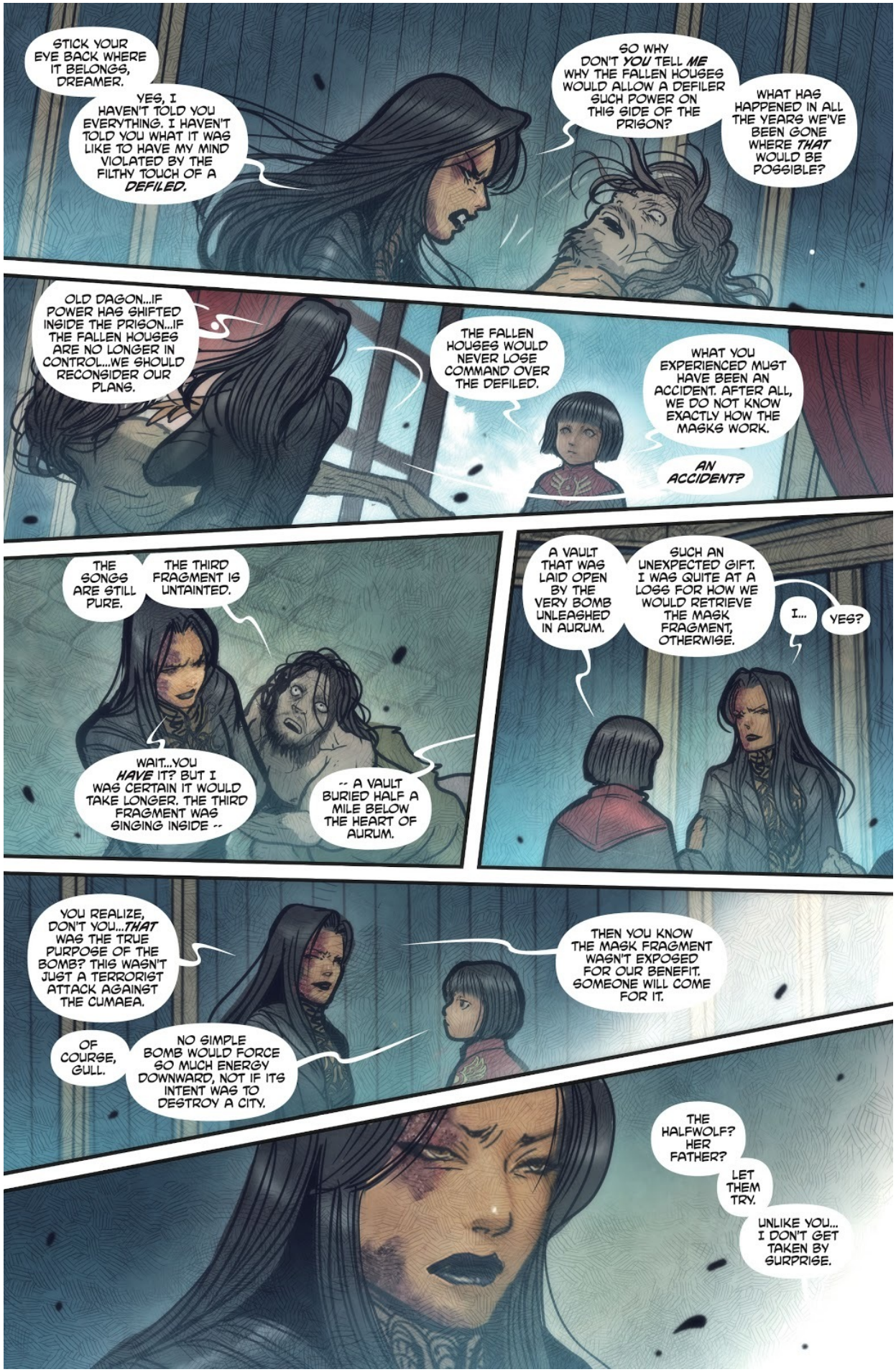
YOU WANT A RIDE TO RAVENNA, CORVIN? FINE. BE READY IN TWO HOURS.
AND YOU...
...PACK YOUR THINGS.
I ALREADY DID.
THAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH HAVING A PACK, HALFWOLF.
SUDDENLY YOUR LIFE IS NO LONGER QUITE YOUR OWN. BUT THAT IS NOT A BAD THING.
ISN'T IT? MY MOTHER TAUGHT ME THAT FRIENDSHIP IS A WEAKNESS.
STRANGE SHE WOULD SAY THAT.
WHEN THE FRIENDS SHE HAD ARE STILL LOYAL, TO HER *AND* YOU, EVEN AFTER HER DEATH.
A BETTER INHERITANCE THAN ANY OTHER SHE LEFT YOU, I SUSPECT.
YOU DON'T KNOW SHIT ABOUT MY MOTHER. AND I HOPE TO THE GODDESS YOU'RE NOT TRYING TO DUPLICATE MY FATHER'S BOMB.
HMM... BOMBS HAVE LIMITED APPLICATIONS.
I'M INTERESTED IN OTHER THINGS. THINGS I THINK YOU LEARNED ABOUT ON THE ISLE OF BONES, WHEN YOU VISITED MY...FORMER COLLEAGUE...LORD ROHAR, THE BLOOD FOX.
ASK HIM YOURSELF.

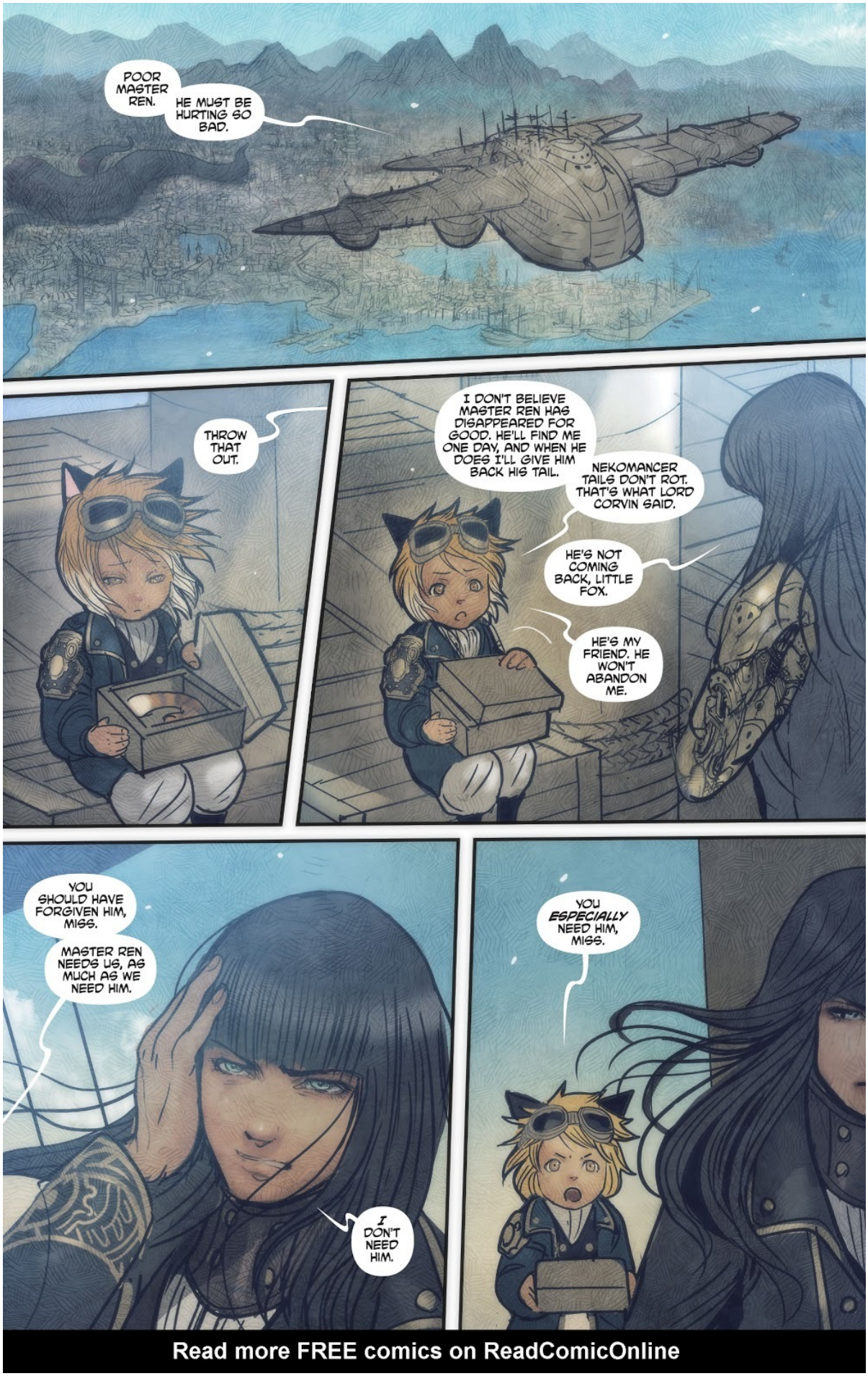
Read more FREE comics on ReadComicOnline

I CANNOT. NOR WOULD I DARE...EVEN IF I DID NOT ALREADY KNOW YOU HAD KILLED HIM.
HOW --
I AM NOT SAD, EXACTLY. LORD ROHAR WAS IN THAT PRISON FOR A REASON, AND THANK THE GODDESS FOR THE CHAINS THAT BOUND HIM WHILE HE LIVED, AND FOR THE SEALS THAT HELD HIM THERE.
HE WAS A VILE MENACE.
BUT, UNFORTUNATELY, HE WAS ALSO A FORMIDABLE SCIENTIST OF THE BIOLOGIC...AND IT IS HIS MIND I MOURN. HIS INTERVENTION WAS THE ONLY REASON WE WERE ABLE TO...
WELL? GO ON.
NOTHING WORTH DISCUSSING NOW.
I WILL NOT BE ACCOMPANYING YOU NORTH, HALFWOLF.
THERE IS TOO MUCH FOR ME TO STUDY, AND I REQUIRE MY LAB TO FULLY UNDERSTAND WHAT YOUR FATHER IS TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH.
THIS COULD BE A WAR ZONE SOON ENOUGH, YOU KNOW.
I'LL MANAGE. ONCE WE WERE QUITE THE WARRIORS, HALFWOLF. YOUR GRANDMOTHER, ESPECIALLY.
YOU MIGHT NEED HER SUPPORT. YOU'RE HEADED INTO DUSK COURT TERRITORY.
NOT FOR LONG. I HAVE A MASK FRAGMENT TO FIND.
AND ZINN? HIS WEAKNESS IS YOURS, HALFWOLF.
HIS WEAKNESS IS MY FATHER. AND MY OWN IGNORANCE.
THE OLD MAN SAID A NAME TO HIM...A NAME THAT FUCKED HIM UP.
MARIUM.

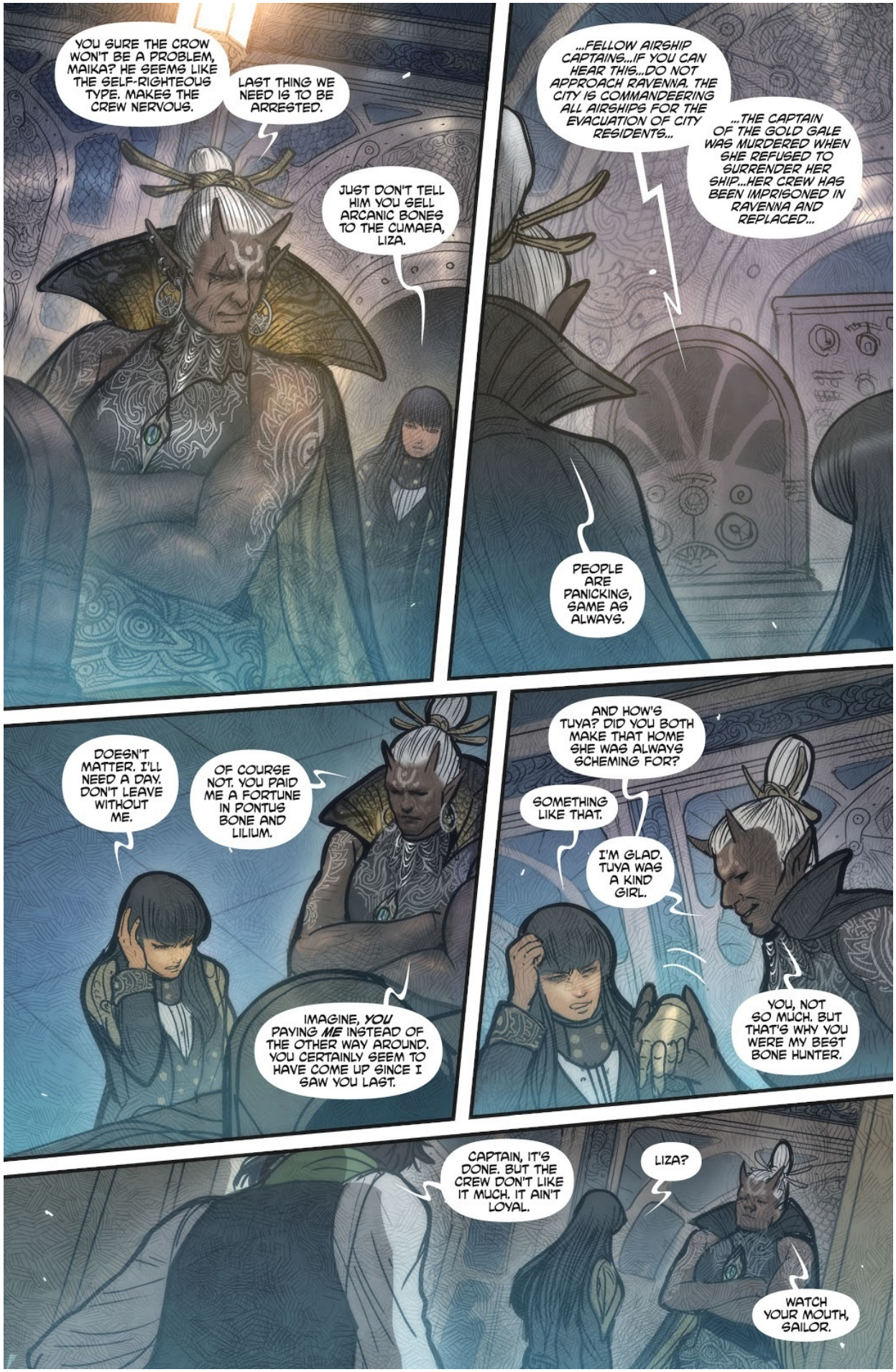
Read more FREE comics on ReadComicOnline


AURUM.
WHAT AN UNEXPECTED COMPLICATION, GULL.
A BOMB... POWERED BY YOUR OWN BLOOD. WE CAN STILL TASTE YOU IN THE SMOKE, IN THE DARK FEVER OF THE ASHES.
AND YOU'RE CERTAIN THE BOMB WAS INVENTED BY ZINN'S FORMER HOST?
YES. HE BEARS THE MARK.
HIS STRENGTH MUST BE CONSIDERABLE, IF HE CAPTURED YOU.
I WAS DISTRACTED BY THE ESCAPE OF OUR SISTER-BROTHER IN PONTUS. STILL, I MANAGED TO FREE MYSELF. HE WON'T CATCH ME AGAIN.
...WARNED YOU...THE EYE IS STRONG...
MAYBE YOU SHOULD HAVE SPECIFIED WHICH EYE YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT.
YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN VIGILANT, NO MATTER WHAT DREAMER TOLD YOU.
AND I SUPPOSE THIS OLD MAN ALSO HAS THE MASK FRAGMENTS YOU WERE SENT TO RETRIEVE? AND WHICH YOU WERE NOT SUPPOSED TO WIELD?
I'VE TOLD YOU, OLD DAGON...*THE MASK CALLED ME.* I WAS COMPELLED. WE SHOULD BE GRATEFUL THAT WE LEARNED WHAT IS POSSIBLE, THAT THE PRISON WALLS CAN BE --
YOU HAVEN'T ANSWERED MY QUESTION.
THE HALFWOLF HAS THEM.
AND GULL... IS NOT TELLING US EVERYTHING. NOT LYING...JUST OMITTING...


STICK YOUR EYE BACK WHERE IT BELONGS, DREAMER.
YES, I HAVEN'T TOLD YOU EVERYTHING. I HAVEN'T TOLD YOU WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO HAVE MY MIND VIOLATED BY THE FILTHY TOUCH OF A DEFILED.
SO WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME WHY THE FALLEN HOUSES WOULD ALLOW A DEFILER SUCH POWER ON THIS SIDE OF THE PRISON?
WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN ALL THE YEARS WE'VE BEEN GONE WHERE THAT WOULD BE POSSIBLE?
OLD DAGON...IF POWER HAS SHIFTED INSIDE THE PRISON...IF THE FALLEN HOUSES ARE NO LONGER IN CONTROL...WE SHOULD RECONSIDER OUR PLANS.
THE FALLEN HOUSES WOULD NEVER LOSE COMMAND OVER THE DEFILED.
WHAT YOU EXPERIENCED MUST HAVE BEEN AN ACCIDENT. AFTER ALL, WE DO NOT KNOW EXACTLY HOW THE MASKS WORK.
AN ACCIDENT?
THE SONGS ARE STILL PURE.
THE THIRD FRAGMENT IS UNTAINTED.
WAIT...YOU HAVE IT? BUT I WAS CERTAIN IT WOULD TAKE LONGER. THE THIRD FRAGMENT WAS SINGING INSIDE --
-- A VAULT BURIED HALF A MILE BELOW THE HEART OF AURUM.
A VAULT THAT WAS LAID OPEN BY THE VERY BOMB UNLEASHED IN AURUM.
SUCH AN UNEXPECTED GIFT. I WAS QUITE AT A LOSS FOR HOW WE WOULD RETRIEVE THE MASK FRAGMENT, OTHERWISE.
I...
YES?
YOU REALIZE, DON'T YOU...THAT WAS THE TRUE PURPOSE OF THE BOMB? THIS WASN'T JUST A TERRORIST ATTACK AGAINST THE CUMAEA.
OF COURSE, GULL.
NO SIMPLE BOMB WOULD FORCE SO MUCH ENERGY DOWNWARD, NOT IF ITS INTENT WAS TO DESTROY A CITY.
THEN YOU KNOW THE MASK FRAGMENT WASN'T EXPOSED FOR OUR BENEFIT. SOMEONE WILL COME FOR IT.
THE HALFWOLF? HER FATHER?
LET THEM TRY.
UNLIKE YOU... I DON'T GET TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

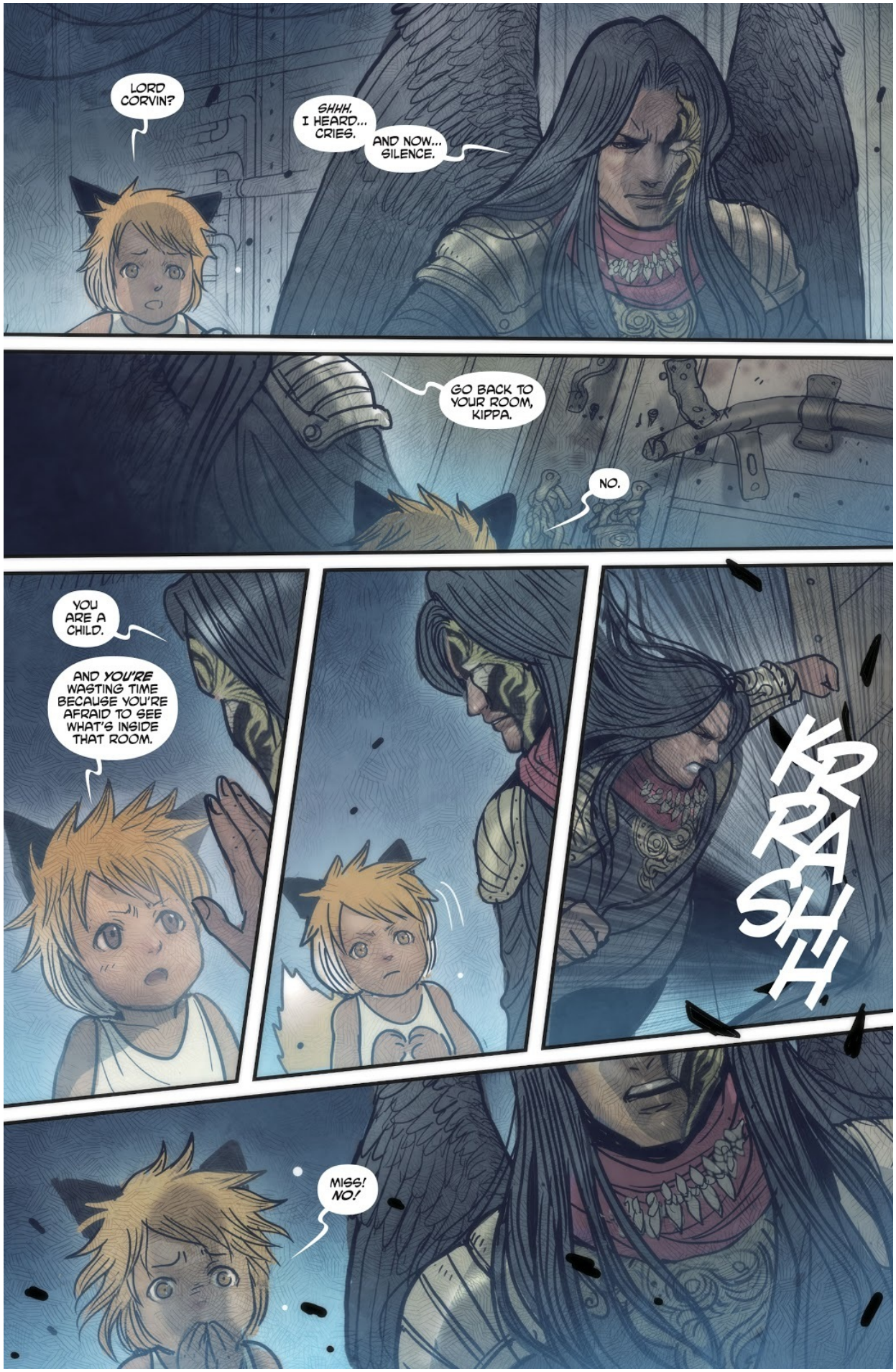

POOR MASTER REN.
HE MUST BE HURTING SO BAD.
THROW THAT OUT.
I DON'T BELIEVE MASTER REN HAS DISAPPEARED FOR GOOD. HE'LL FIND ME ONE DAY, AND WHEN HE DOES I'LL GIVE HIM BACK HIS TAIL.
NEKOMANCER TAILS DON'T ROT. THAT'S WHAT LORD CORVIN SAID.
HE'S NOT COMING BACK, LITTLE FOX.
HE'S MY FRIEND. HE WON'T ABANDON ME.
YOU SHOULD HAVE FORGIVEN HIM, MISS.
MASTER REN NEEDS US, AS MUCH AS WE NEED HIM.
I DON'T NEED HIM.
YOU *ESPECIALLY* NEED HIM, MISS.

Read more FREE comics on ReadComicOnline


YOU SURE THE CROW WON'T BE A PROBLEM, MAIKA? HE SEEMS LIKE THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS TYPE. MAKES THE CREW NERVOUS.
LAST THING WE NEED IS TO BE ARRESTED.
JUST DON'T TELL HIM YOU SELL ARCANIC BONES TO THE CUMAEA, LIZA.
...FELLOW AIRSHIP CAPTAINS...IF YOU CAN HEAR THIS...DO NOT APPROACH RAVENNA. THE CITY IS COMMANDEERING ALL AIRSHIPS FOR THE EVACUATION OF CITY RESIDENTS...
...THE CAPTAIN OF THE GOLD GALE WAS MURDERED WHEN SHE REFUSED TO SURRENDER HER SHIP...HER CREW HAS BEEN IMPRISONED IN RAVENNA AND REPLACED...
PEOPLE ARE PANICKING, SAME AS ALWAYS.
DOESN'T MATTER. I'LL NEED A DAY. DON'T LEAVE WITHOUT ME.
OF COURSE NOT. YOU PAID ME A FORTUNE IN PONTUS BONE AND LILIUM.
IMAGINE, YOU PAYING ME INSTEAD OF THE OTHER WAY AROUND. YOU CERTAINLY SEEM TO HAVE COME UP SINCE I SAW YOU LAST.
AND HOW'S TUYA? DID YOU BOTH MAKE THAT HOME SHE WAS ALWAYS SCHEMING FOR?
SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
I'M GLAD. TUYA WAS A KIND GIRL.
YOU, NOT SO MUCH. BUT THAT'S WHY YOU WERE MY BEST BONE HUNTER.
CAPTAIN, IT'S DONE. BUT THE CREW DON'T LIKE IT MUCH. IT AIN'T LOYAL.
LIZA?
WATCH YOUR MOUTH, SAILOR.

WHAT NOW, LIZA?
THERE ARE FEDERATION SPIES AMONGST MY CREW. THEY'VE BEEN USEFUL FOR KEEPING THE PATROLS AWAY WHEN WE ENTER FEDERATION AIRSPACE...
...BUT THIS MORNING ONE OF THEM TRIED TO SEND A MESSAGE TO THE CUMAEA... ABOUT YOU.
MY ENGINEER SCRAMBLED THE TRANSMISSION, BUT THERE'S ANOTHER PROBLEM...
...YOUR REPUTATION PRECEDES YOU.
RUMORS, GOSSIP. NO ONE CAN DECIDE IF YOU SAVED PONTUS, OR DESTROYED IT.
BUT SOME OF MY CREW DIDN'T WANT YOU ON BOARD.
I'LL HOLD THEM ALL UNTIL YOU'RE GONE.
ALL I NEEDED... ANOTHER HEADACHE ON TOP OF THIS ONE.

YAFAELA?!
WHAT ARE YOU...
WHY DO YOU...
:GASP:
YOU'RE A GHOST. YOU'RE... DEAD.
IS THIS... IS THIS MY FAULT?
YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO BE HURT. THE DRACUL PROMISED.


LORD CORVIN?
SHHH. I HEARD... CRIES.
AND NOW... SILENCE.
GO BACK TO YOUR ROOM, KIPPA.
NO.
YOU ARE A CHILD.
AND YOU'RE WASTING TIME BECAUSE YOU'RE AFRAID TO SEE WHAT'S INSIDE THAT ROOM.
KRASH.
MISS! NO!

TO BE CONTINUED...

MONSTRESS™ ISSUE 25

WRITTEN BY MARJORIE LIU
ILLUSTRATED BY SANA TAKEDA

LETTERING & DESIGN BY RUS WOOTON
EDITED BY JENNIFER M SMITH
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: CERI RILEY

NEXT ISSUE

IMAGE COMICS, INC.
Robert Kirkman—Chief Operating Officer
Erik Larsen—Chief Financial Officer
Todd McFarlane—President
Marc Silvestri—Chief Executive Officer
Jim Valentino—Vice President
Eric Stephenson—Publisher/Chief Creative Officer
Jeff Boison—Director of Publishing Planning & Book Trade Sales
Chris Ross—Director of Digital Services
Jeff Stang—Director of Direct Market Sales
Kat Salazar—Director of PR & Marketing
Drew Gill—Cover Editor
Heather Doornink—Production Director
Nicole Lapalme—Controller
IMAGECOMICS.COM

MONSTRESS™ CREATED BY MARJORIE LIU & SANA TAKEDA

MONSTRESS™ #25. January 2020. Published by Image Comics, Inc. Office of publication: 2701 NW Vaughn St., Suite 780, Portland, OR 97210.
Copyright © 2020 Marjorie Liu & Sana Takeda. All rights reserved. "Monstress," its logos, and the likenesses of all characters herein are trademarks of Marjorie Liu & Sana Takeda, unless otherwise noted. "Image" and the Image Comics logos are registered trademarks of Image Comics, Inc. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means (except for short excerpts for journalistic or review purposes), without the express written permission of Marjorie Liu & Sana Takeda, or Image Comics, Inc. All names, characters, events, and locales in this publication are entirely fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons (living or dead), events, or places, without satirical intent, is coincidental. Digital edition. For international rights, contact: foreignlicensing@imagecomics.com.

MONSTRESS
IMAGECOMICS.COM
RATED M / MATURE • EPIC FANTASY